

Lost In City 17

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Summary: Avaya is just a small girl. She wakes up in a train station, all alone, with her parents nowhere to be found. Desperate and hopeless, she finds a kind soul among cold faces. Please Read & Review! A break from the norm! AU.

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Author Notes: One shot. Sort of AU, sort of Canon. I tried to make it as true as I could, given the fact that I haven't played the game yet (old compy) it was difficult. I hope I did a respectable job, and I hope you enjoy it nevertheless.

Avaya woke slowly, her vision returned to her and she began to recognize things. But what she recognized was only the very most general of things. She recognized what things were, but not where they were. She did not know where she was.

She looked around the empty passenger car as the doors hissed open. She did not remember getting on a train. She was very confused, and naturally looked for her mama and papa. The train car was empty, however. Her parents were nowhere to be found.

She got up, her teddy clutched by its arm, and stepped out onto the platform.

Immediately, a floating contraption hovered over to her and took her picture, a blinding flash that made her shield her eyes. She looked around again, blinking the spots from her vision, and still could not see her parents.

She stepped slowly, aimlessly, looking around for the worried faces of her dear mama and papa. She waited by the train car for minutes, waiting for the shouts of her parents, glad that she was alright, and angry that she had gone missing. They never came, and she never saw them.

She saw few people, mostly men. They seemed to mope around and shuffled slowly, aimlessly like her. Maybe they were waiting for their families too?

Then there were the men in dark uniforms, wearing strange masks that looked alien. They walked and stood around all corners of the station, telling people to move on. They carried batons with them, and did not look or sound friendly.

Slowly but surely, Avaya began to feel cold and alone. Every so often she would shuffle a few feet and look around, as if her parents would come and whisk her away. She shivered and clutched the one-button-eyed teddy bear to her chest.

Eventually, she made her way over to an empty bench against the wall. Above, the soothing voice of a man played over the speakers. "Welcome to City 17. One of our last and best urban centers, maintained by our gracious benefactors. City 17: it's safer here."

The voice continued to repeat the message over and over again. Avaya's eyes watered as she thought more and more about her parents. Where were they? Why didn't they come for her? She didn't feel safe. She felt afraid. She began to sob. It was not a cry of a spoiled or upset child, but one of despair and helplessness.

"Hey, kid," came a voice. The sound was harsh and grating.

She looked up through tear-streaked eyes and saw one of the dark uniformed men, seemingly towering above her. She recoiled at the strange sight of his mask.

"Whoa," the man said, raising his gloved hands with the palms facing her. "Easy now. I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to help." The Metrocop had been keeping an eye on the girl ever since she arrived.

She clutched her teddy tightly, looking over the top of its head, peering at the scary looking man.

"Where are you parents?" he asked, concerned. He looked around himself, and saw no one that looked like they had lost a child. It was an honest question, children were always sent with their parents. He looked down as saw she was crying.

"Hey, hey," he knelt down so that they were at the same level. "What's the matter? Are your parents missing?"

She dried her tears with the back of her hand and nodded.

"They weren't with you on the train?" the Metrocop said, slightly surprised. It was a realization, rather than a question.

She nodded again, anyway.

The Metrocop thought for a moment. "Come on," he said, and started to leave. The little girl didn't follow. "Don't you want to come with me?"

The girl shook her head.

"Why not?"

"You're scary," she said meekly.

The Metrocop, knelt again. "I'm not scary. What's your teddy bear's name?"

"Barry," she said, slowly.

"Hello, Barry, I'm Sergeant Johnson," he said, pretending to introduce himself to the ragged toy. "Well, Barry doesn't look scared to me. See?"

"That's because he's just a stuffed animal," Avaya said innocently. "He isn't real."

Johnson chuckled, feeling a little embarrassed. "I guess you're too old for that, then."

"My Papa always said to not go with strangers," she explained.

Johnson nodded. "That's good advice. But I'm a Metrocop," he said without realizing that she had no idea what that was, and if she did she probably wouldn't want to go with him anyway.

"You mean like a policeman?" she asked.

Johnson paused, and nodded slowly. "Yes, like a policeman." Emphasis was on 'like'.

"Okay." She slid off the bench.

Johnson started to walk, and a small hand grasped his own from behind. It caught him off guard, and for a moment, he felt... normal... good. He smiled and squeezed back slightly. "Let's go find your parents, okay?"

"Okay."

He lead her through the winding fences and into the security checkpoint. She looked around at the other nearly identical looking men. They seemed to look at her in a most unfriendly way. Avaya squeezed Johnson's hand, and moved closer to him.

"Playing babysitter now?" one of them said.

"She's lost her parents," Johnson said, though they didn't change their attitude. "Okay, sweetie, go stand in the middle and they'll take your picture, then we'll go find your parents."

She looked up at him and nodded. "Okay." She stepped into the middle and a bright flash went off.

Johnson extended his hand, signaling her to come back. She did, and they went to the metal door in the wall. It slid open, revealing a dimly lit corridor.

They walked through quickly passed door after door, because Johnson knew what horrors lay behind them. He felt dirty and ashamed, like he was corrupting the innocent girl just by putting her so close to the horrible things they did. As they walked, he heard a distant cry of anguish.

"What is that?" she asked.

"Nothing. Don't listen to it, sweetie." He choked down a feeling of intense loathing of himself. "Just walk."

They finally reached the last door at the very end of the hall. He opened the door, revealing a dingy office, with two desks and two chairs in front of them.

She sat on one of them automatically. "I'm thirsty," she said, quately. It wasn't a complaint, so much as it sounded just like a statement of fact.

He went over to the kettle and poured her a cup of water, boiled so that it was safe. He used his own cup, because it was the only one he knew was clean. She sipped it slowly.

"What's you name?" eh asked, leaning on the desk.

"Avaya," she answered.

"That's a pretty name. What about your parents?"

"I don't know. I just call them Mama and Papa."

He would have laughed at her cuteness if her situation weren't so lamentable. "Do you know your last name?"

She nodded. "Anderson."

He took a pen and notepad and scribbled her name. He then moved over to the small computer on the desk, and printed out copies of her face with her name captioned at the bottom. If they were real police, he could ask the others to look, but they weren't interested. He'd have to put up posters.

The door opened and another Metrocop entered. He looked at the girl, then at Johnson. "Who is this? Why aren't you guarding the platform?"

"There aren't anymore trains."

"That's besides the point. Those were your orders. Now, who is this girl?"

"Her name is Avaya Anderson. She's lost her parents."

"What are we, 'missing persons'?" the man said, sarcastically.

Johnson's temper flared suddenly. "Look, the shift is over, so I can do whatever hell I want on my own time. I'm going to help her find her parents," Johnson said, adamantly.

He was silent for a moment, perhaps seething. "Go ahead, you know the risks," he said dismissively. "Just don't expect me to go and find your body." He left.

He sighed as Avaya looked at him. "Sorry, Avaya. Some people aren't very nice. You know how things are these days... it changes people." People like me, he thought.

"I know," she said. "It's alright."

"Come on, we should get started finding your mom and dad now." Thankfully, they left through the back door.

The streets were devoid of life, for the most part; martial law had done that. Most people stayed inside to avoid the Metrocops, as they had learned to fear and revile them. It was not surprising, then, that Johnson walked four three blocks without seeing a soul on the way. Whether or not there was simply no one around, or they had hidden from him, he couldn't tell.

Johnson hated the silent and still streets. They always felt like they were just waiting to erupt into chaos, like the calm before the storm. As he walked further, he began to realize what a stupid thing it was to be out alone, entire squads were known to be attacked by the Resistance, and one single Metrocop was almost a ridiculously easy target. He looked down at the young girl, and she looked up at him. He prayed he hadn't put her life in jeopardy.

They turned a corner, and saw about five men talking near the burned out hulk of a car. Technically, the gathering was illegal, but Johnson was glad to finally see some potential information disseminators.

"If you recognize anyone, let me know, okay?" he asked Avaya.

She nodded.

As he approached, he became fairly certain that they weren't really up to anything. If they were, they would have been much more attentive of their surroundings. He was within earshot when they finally noticed him. They were talking about the Combine, and how evil it was. Bad mouthing the Combine was just about all there was to do in City 17. Of course, the Combine deserved every bit of it and so much more, Johnson admitted.

He served the Combine, yes, but only because he had no way out. When he had joined, the Combine had been the way to peace... or at least that was the way it had presented itself.

All conversation stopped when they saw him, and hostility held in check only by fear of retribution prevented them from using their numerical advantage to take him down. That, and perhaps the small girl holding his hand. The hostility changed to curiosity.

"You shouldn't be out here, like this," Johnson began. "There's a ban on gatherings large than three people." They showed annoyance in

their faces. "But I don't care about that. I need your help."

"Why should we help you, Metrocop?" one man spat, with contempt dripping in his voice.

"Then don't help me. Help her," he gestured to Avaya. "She can't find her parents."

They seemed to study the girl, who now hid halfway behind Johnson, peering out at them.

"Her name's Avaya Anderson. Do any of you know any couples that have lost a kid?"

"A lot of people have lost children," one man said bitterly.

"What's her parent's names?" another asked.

"She doesn't know."

"Well, I know of a Mr. and Mrs. Anderson. They were sleeping at the 33rd Street Shelter a few days ago."

"Did they lose a girl?" Johnson asked.

"I don't know," the man shrugged. "All I know is their names."

Johnson asked where the shelter was, and the man provided directions. His friends didn't seem to approve, but didn't object either. He probably had Avaya to thank for that.

"Thank you, citizen." Johnson dug into his jacket and retrieved two meal rations. He tossed one to the man. "For your help." The ration bar would last three meals, if conserved.

They continued to walk in the direction of the shelter. "Hungry?" he asked Avaya, who nodded. He gave her the other meal bar.

The bar was nothing if not nutritious. It was supposed to be roast beef flavoured, but Avaya didn't seem to agree. Either that, or she was just having fun making weird faces. She still ate the whole bar, however.

"Here," he said, taking another foil-wrapped bar out of his jacket pocket. "It's a little melted, but I think you'll like it."

She opened the wrapper and danced with glee. She dove into the creamy brown mess. Chocolate, like all luxuries, were extremely rare commodities. Given that he rarely saw chocolate, he knew that Avaya probably had seen even less.

They walked on for a few blocks more. Avaya tugged on Johnson's arm. "What is it?"

"My feet hurt," she said.

It had been a few miles they had walked, and it surprised him that Avaya had walked as much as she had, especially in worn out, old sneakers.

"It's not too much longer," Johnson explained. "Here, put your arms around my neck." He knelt.

He lifted her, and held her up in his arms, while she held on around his collar.

Avaya was lighter than Johnson expected. It made her easier to carry, but that did not please him. Underweight usually meant malnourished.

They got to the shelter and went inside. The place was a large room with bunks, cots, and sleeping bags arranged in rows on the floor. Many people milled about. He was noticed immediately, and the mood and activity changed and halted respectively.

"I'm looking for Mr. and Mrs. Anderson," Johnson announced.

A couple came forward. "That's us."

Johnson knew instantly that it wasn't them. If it were, they'd be running forwards to claim their child. He looked at Avaya.

"That's not them," she said, quietly.

"This isn't your child, is it?" Johnson asked.

They shook their heads. "No, I'm afraid not."

"This girl can't find her parents. Does anyone here know anyone who's lost a girl? Her name is Avaya Anderson," he entreated the crowd. No one offered any help. For a moment, Johnson was irrationally angry with himself for getting his hopes up.

"I'm sorry, Avaya," Johnson apologized, hanging his head.

"Don't be sad. It's not your fault," she said.

He turned to leave with Avaya, when a striking young woman stepped forward. "Wait. There's another shelter nearby. You might have better luck there. I'll show you where it is."

He nodded. "Alright."

The other shelter was on the next street over. It was somewhat smaller, but seemed to be better equipped. It was more soup kitchen, than shelter, but it was obvious it doubled as both.

When they entered, there was a brief moment of friendly recognition, and suspicious brought about by Johnson's presence. Then one of confusion brought about by Avaya.

"Avaya!" came a frantic voice from the left. The crowd parted and a woman came barreling forwards, with a man with a mustache close behind.

Johnson set her on the ground, and she ran to them, screaming, "Mama! Papa!"

"Oh, Avaya! I thought I had lost you! Oh, my sweet Avaya!"

It was a heartwarming moment for all those who witnessed it. They held each other closely, as if afraid that she might disappear again. They wept infectious tears of joy that spread to all the bystanders.

Johnson blinked away the wetness that had come to his eyes. He was glad for the gasmask that hid his face. He held the scene in his memory, filing it carefully away, so as not to forget. He turned to leave, but a remark, seemingly directed at him, stopped him.

"That's something you don't see everyday," the young woman said.

"What is?"

"A happy ending," she explained. "You don't see Metrocops doing something noble often either," she added.

"You don't ever see that."

"I'd normally agree with you. But, today I did." Johnson turned to face her, and she continued. "You did a very good thing. You're a hero."

"I'm not a hero. I'm just not a monster," he protested. He had no right to have the label of 'hero'.

"To that little girl, you are."

Johnson fought that idea fleetingly, but accepted it silently.

"You seem like a good guy. Why are you a Metrocop?" she asked.

"It's complicated. When I joined, the Combine was pretending to be benevolent, and I bought it. Now, I'm in too deep. I've got no choice."

"You've always got a choice. Just like how you chose to help that little girl, you can choose to switch sides," she said.

Johnson chuckled dryly. "You mean join the Resistance?"

"Not necessarily, but that's a possibility."

He was silent for a moment. "I wouldn't know how to get a hold of them, anyway."

"What if you could?"

"Sir?" Johnson saw the Andersons approaching. "Thank you for reuniting us with our daughter. When we were separated, I thought for sure that we'd never see her again. Thank you." He shook his hand.

Avaya rushed forward and wrapped her arms around his waist. Johnson chuckled and crouched. She threw her arms around him in hug, and he returned the gesture. "Thank you," she said. And pecked him on the side of the mask.

They walked off, and Avaya waved. Johnson waved back, almost saddened to see her go.

"Seeing a Combine Metrocop hugging a small child is a bit surreal," the woman commented.

"She helped me to feel human again," he said to no one in particular. There was a pause. "Will you have me?"

"Sorry?"

"The Resistance. Will you let me join? I'm a Metrocop, I don't see how you could trust me."

"No one said I was in the Resistance," she said, defensively. "Though, the answer is 'yes, we will,'" she added, with a smirk. "As for trust, I don't think that will be a problem, given what I've seen here."

"So, should I go back to my post, or do I stay?"

"I wouldn't go back to the station, if I were you, it's already been taken out," came the grating voice of another Metrocop.

Johnson spun, his hand unbuttoning his pistol.

"Whoa! Don't shoot, I'm on your side!"

The woman put her hand on Johnson's. "He's with us. You're not the only Metrocop to defect, you know."

"Granted, I was a bit predisposed."

Johnson recognized the Metrocop. He was from his checkpoint.
"Calhoun?"

"The one and only," he said, taking off his mask. "Glad to see you're joining the winning team." He turned to the woman. "Gordon's arrived. I got separated, but he should be on his way."

"Good, it's time, then."

"Time for what?" Johnson asked.

"Uprising," the woman said. "With Gordon here, our plan will finally work."

"Who's Gordon? Some kind of god, is he?"

"You could say that. I've lost track of all the times we both cheated death escaping from Black Mesa. He's some kind of indestructible man, I swear," Barney said, with a slight grin.

"It's time to go, we'll need to get into position," the woman ordered. She was obviously one of the higher-ups. "Barney, you know what to do."

"What am I suppose to do? I don't even know your name!"

"My name's Alyx."

"Johnson."

"Okay, now that that settled, follow me."

Johnson knew one thing for certain. All hell was about to break loose. It was going to be a long, bloody, and tough revolt. But for once, He was fighting for the right side this time. He was fighting for Avaya.

"Hey, Johnson," came Barney's voice from behind, "catch me later and I'll buy you a beer."

THE END

WHAT DID YOU THINK? PLEASE REVIEW!!! IF YOU LIKED THIS STORY, TRY MY OTHERS!

End
file.